

Group I Series: STUDENT ESSAYS

208 [Contrasts in Historical Styles] by S. Saito

*

It would be a matter of great interest to give an idea how the oriental or more particularly the Japanese and Chinese historians treat their histories.

Do they manage them as the European writer might do? This will be denied by anybody who has a little acquaintance with the conditions of Asiatic society, though he may not have read even a single line of its history.

Asiatic civilization, if I may use such expression, is truly more chivalric clothed with pure despotism, and everything is, as of it were, secret and entirely unexposed to the public.

The government is in the hand of few, and has always endeavored to carry everything privately within a narrow circle bounded by few despots; and when they have finished it they would have enforced it right through without paying even slightest attention to the petitions from the people.

The consequence of this has been that the great revolutions and improvements which have no make of warlike dispositions or anything which makes them to be known to the public, but are essential and perhaps more important elements of history than others, the historians have no occasion to mention with any hope of accuracy and certainly.

From this it necessarily follows that the chief contents of the histories of the Asiatic nations are merely the names of kings and emperors, the change of dynasties, wars, great and wonderful visitations of nature and others of like kind, all of which are less important and of little value to the future ages, compared with any great emergencies which effect the customs of the people, and introduce the country into the domain of high civilization.

Nor is this the only point of characteristic of the histories of the oriental nation^{and} of distinction from those of the European countries. It is a great regret on the part of Asiatic nations that they have the false idea of loyalty. They, — particularly the Chinese, seem to think that loyalty consists merely in words and language. They speak of their country, ruler, habits &c. most splendidly, and try to show that nothing of like nature can be found among the other nations of the world. To testify this they frequently if not always color the facts so as to make them favorable to this hypocrisy, and so render their histories great deal though not entirely incredible, and ^{to} give no value whatever.

As far as my judgment goes most of the writers of Europe and America in treating common and not philosophical histories simply state ^{the} facts as clearly and exact as they can find, and leave the discussion to be decided by the readers, and so give tolerably good and valuable exercises to the students of history as well as to the men of world. Our writers, on the contrary, treat the historical events as arguments and problems rather than the facts themselves, and try to insist their opinions upon the readers. The readers, in turn, without paying much attention to the nature of facts always judge the works by the opinions established by the authors. Thus tending to bring the province of history under the dominion of Logic.

The summary of the foregoing statement will after all be that the European writers generally make a precise distinction between common history and the philosophy of history, and found two modes of writing history, both of which are very instructive, but our historians mix them up and leave an unsatisfactory result behind.

S. Saito.